2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

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CHAPTER 11

Government: Internal

INTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

Before attempting to understand the over-all system of government in Mbuti society, it is necessary to distinguish between different fields of authority, for each field of activity has its own leaders, drawn from a particular segment of the community. It is in this way that authority is dispersed throughout the band; every adult is accorded special respect in one field or another, but none can claim respect in all fields. Individual authority is unthinkable, and not only are there no chiefs or headmen in Mbuti society; there are not even any councils of elders or any ritual specialists such as prophets or diviners. Such adults as have respect in any particular field at any particular moment do not even have any authority; they can merely claim to be heard. Their decision is likely to be given general assent and, as in economic matters, that decision is then said to be "good," and "pleasing" to the forest. The forest personified as a benevolent divinity remains as the only recognized authority, one which sometimes expresses its feelings with unmistakable clarity; an excessive storm, falling trees, poor hunting and ill health may all be taken as signs of displeasure, while good weather and good health and good hunting are indications that all is well. But often the forest remains silent. Then the Mbuti have to sound its feelings out through discussion. Dreams may be taken into account, but there is no question of waiting for visible signs of the forest's pleasure. The delegation of authority is clear; the decision of the whole band, the very fact of unanimity, is sufficient sign of the favor of the forest. There is always diversity of opinion, freely expressed, but prolonged disagreement is considered as "noise," and offensive to the forest. Unanimity, therefore, is a powerful and positive value, equated with the opposite to noise—quiet, or *ekimi*.

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